Blood and Circuses
From Kingswood Country to The Slap
AN IRRESPONSIBLE MEMOIR
Lex Marinos
dancers, and gorgeously statuesque chorus girls.

The highlight came when the most glamorous woman I’d ever seen took to the stage—tall, with beautiful blonde hair, elegantly costumed in a long, sparkling dress. As the orchestra struck up something with an exotic rhythm, she began to sway and twist and turn, moving sensually around the stage. The diaphanous panels of fabric hanging from her dress swirled as she twirled. The rhythm became more insistent as she moved . . .

But something must have gone wrong. She seemed to be losing bits of her dress as she moved around. Then she peeled off her long gloves and threw them nonchalantly away. The drums and cymbals pounded and punctuated. My blood pulsed in time to the rhythm. I looked to Dad for some explanation, but he was leaning forward, transfixed. I quickly
looked at Mum, who seemed more concerned and was biting her bottom lip.

Trumpets shrieked and cymbals crashed as the woman began writhing. It seemed like she was having difficulty keeping her dress up, so she was forced to step out of it. She was now only in her undies. How embarrassing. Why didn’t she stop? Instead she kept going, while the lights pulsed and the relentless rhythm became unbearable. She shook and she shimmied and then, as the music reached its crescendo, she reached up and tore off her hair. And her bra. And she was . . . a MAN!

Blackout. The audience (led by Dad?) was on its feet applauding and cheering. And, although I had no idea what was going on, somehow I knew in that moment, amid the magic and mystery, that this was the business I wanted to be in.

So as I search the mirror for Dad, I
occasionally fancy I can see that incredulous little boy peering over his shoulder. If I tilt my head and squint—if the light is right, if the angle of incidence is true—I can fuse the two images and catch a fleeting glimpse of myself.
Kasos is a small rocky island, part of the Dodecanese (literally ‘twelve islands’, but there are more than a hundred in fact) in the Aegean Sea. These days you can reach it via light plane or ferry from Rhodos, or alternatively from the most eastern point of Crete. In ancient times, its early settlements were Minoan and Mycenaean, and it sent ships to the Trojan War. It was ruled by the Venetians for two centuries during the
Middle Ages, then by the Ottoman Turks for three centuries.

In 1824, at the beginning of the Greek War of Independence, the Kasiots defiantly declared their allegiance to Greece, for which they were brutally punished by Mehmet Ali, the Pasha of Egypt, who despatched an armada to burn and pillage the island, and slaughter most of its inhabitants. Despite independence being achieved on the Greek mainland in 1830, the islands, including the scant population that survived on Kasos, remained under Turkish rule until the Italians took control in the early part of the twentieth century. It wasn’t until 1947 that the United Nations returned the Dodecanese islands to Greece. Australia’s ‘Doc’ Evatt played a significant part in this process, as a prominent United Nations diplomat, and as a politician whose